

SEASONABLE
ADVICE

TO

Nonconforming-Ministers,

About the

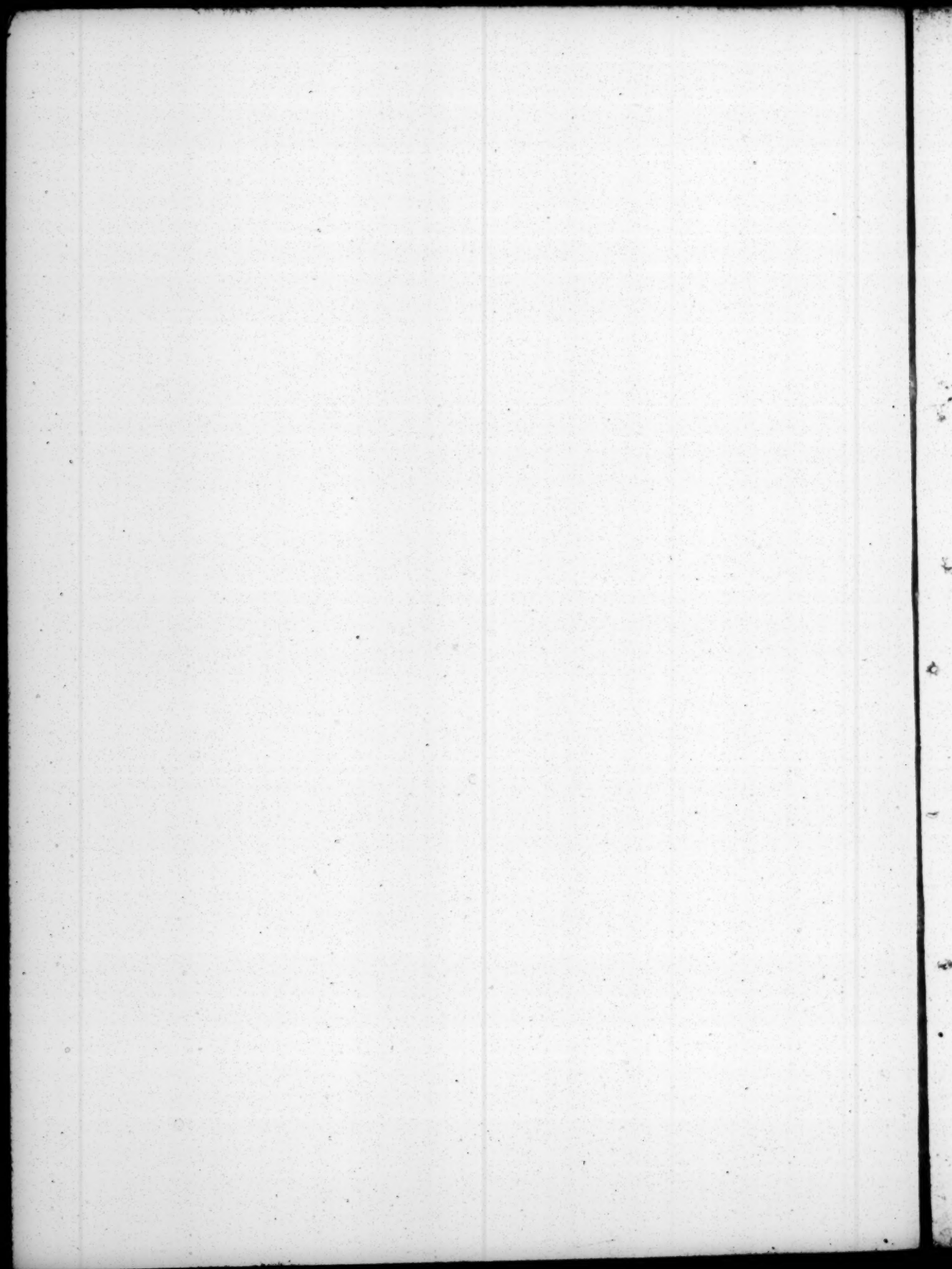
Oxford Oath,

The Reading and Hearing of *Common-Prayer*,
and Preaching in Private Assemblies, &c.

As presented by the

LONDON,

Printed for T. S. and are to be Sold by L. Carter. 1683.



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THE AMERICAN

REVIEW

OF THE

PROGRESS OF

THE

ARTS

AND

Seasonable A D V I C E, &c.

THe general Mistake of People concerning *Conformity* and *Nonconformity*, and the mischievous consequence thereof, especially in regard to my own Case, doth necessitate me to give the World some account of it, that I may thereby endeavour to cure the *Prejudice*, and remove the *Stumbling-blocks* that at present lie in their way: And the late rigorous execution of the Penal Statutes upon *Dissenters*, contrary to the last Vote of the *House of Commons* at *Westminster*, hath put me upon many serious thoughts of heart, what may be done at such a time as this, to oppose the *Popish* design of introducing *Popery*, and invading of our *Property*.

As the destroying of *Religion* and *Property* is their End; so the reproaching, impoverishing, imprisoning; and ruining of *Protestants* by railing Pamphlets, forging of Lies, suborning of Witnesses, encouraging mercenary Informers, presenting to Bishops Courts, Excommunicating, &c. are the *Means* for the attaining of these Ends.

But if People did consider, that as *Dividing* and *Destroying* is the work of *Rapists*, so *Uniting* and *Healing* of breaches is *OUR* work, and would act accordingly in their several places, *THIS* would prevent our Popish adversaries in their Designs against us. Let us do what we can without Sin in *Obedience* to *Authority*, and then when it comes to the Tryal, that we must either *Sin* or *Suffer*, it will be a great comfort to us, when we can truly say, that we have chosen to *Suffer*, rather than to *Sin*.

But if there be no *Sin* in the case, we must not expose our selves or people to sufferings *Causlessly*. We cannot *suffer joyfully* the *spoiling* our Goods, the confinement of our *Persons*, or the ruin of our *Families*; unless *Conscience* be able truly to say, I would have done any thing but Sin against *GOD*, that I might have avoided these Sufferings from men.

It was the saying of a Reverend Minister Mr. J. B. of *Worcester*, when he lay upon his Death-bed, and was asked what thoughts he had of his Non-conformity? *I would have done any thing but Sin*, saith he, *that I might have continued in the exercise of my Ministry: but when it came to that, there was no remedy.*

This Minister read the *Common-Prayer* in his Church, when the *KING* desired that the Ministers

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sters would read so much of it as they were satisfied in their consciences was lawful to be read, and a while after (on Bartholomew day, 1662.) turned out with the rest of his Brethren.

Many more read the *Common Prayer* before, and yet proved Nonconformists after; and if that had been all that had been required of the Nonconformists, to read the *Ordinary Lords-day Service* according to the Liturgy & Practice of the Church of England, the most of the Nonconformists had continued in the exercise of their Ministry in Publick as well as others.

Whereas therefore the Ignorant among us know not what *Conformity* or *Nonconformity* is, but account it offensive, if a Minister read the *Common Prayer*, or go to the Publick Church, and joyn with those that do read it, and are ready to refuse Communion with those Ministers or Churches who use it: 'tis high time to rectify this mistake, & teach them better; lest by silence in these matters, the People run into the sin of *Schism* indeed. Not only to separate from those in the publick Churches, but from their own Pastors, when once they reduce their Principles into Practice, by reading so much of the *Service* as they approve of, and will satisfy the Law.

I shall therefore desire All to take notice of three Laws made within these Twenty Years past, which the Nonconformists are sufferers by.

The first is the *Act of Uniformity*, requiring not only the Reading of the *Common-Prayer* (which in the *Ordinary Service* I believe most of us do account lawful) but it requires also, that openly and publickly we declare before the Congregation, *Our unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing contained and prescribed in and by the Book of Common-Prayer, and Administration of Sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England, together with the Psalter, and the Form or Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.* And in the same *Act* it is required, that we Declare and Subscribe, that we will Conform to the *Liturgy of the Church of England, as it is now by Law Established*, besides what concerns the *Renouncing of the Covenant, and Re-ordination.*

There is a great deal of difference (let us note here) between *All* and *Some*; between *Reading the ordinary Lords-Days-Service, and Approving the Book, and all that is in it.* Mr. Baxter in his *Plea for Peace*, gives no less than *Thirty particular Instances of several things in the Common-Prayer-Book,* which

which the *Non-conformists* cannot declare their Assent and Consent unto. Such as will be at the pains to read them, may thereby understand that we are far from a full Conformity *Throughout*, notwithstanding the Censures & Reproaches of some against us as too Conformable, because we declare by our Principles, and Practices, that we can lawfully not only *Hear Common-Prayer*, but *Read* it our selves: And yet though we cannot Conform to the *Law* by doing all it commands, we have manifested by our Peaceable Submission, that we can patiently suffer the Penalty it inflicts, viz. The casting us out of our Livings, and rendering us incapable of Church-Preferments for the time to come, with other Penalties there mentioned) until the King and Parliament shall see cause to relieve us.

Most of the *Non-conforming* Ministers who can with a good Conscience read *Common-Prayer*, and thereby secure themselves from the Penalty of the *Conventicle-Act*, cannot declare their *unfeigned Assent and Consent to the Book and all that is in it*, if they might have the greatest Preferments of Hundreds or Thousands *Per annum* for their pains.

Another Law against *Non-Conformists* is that made at *Oxford*, (by some called the *Five miles Act*) for restraining *Non-Conformists* from Inhabiting in Cor-

perations: the penalty whereof is six months Imprisonment, unless upon or before such Commitments, such Offenders shall before the Justices of the Peace, Swear and Subscribe this Oath following: I A. B. do swear, that it is not lawful upon any pretence whatsoever to take Arms against the King; And that I do abhor that traitterous Position of taking Arms by his Authority against his Person, or against those that are Commissionated by him in pursuance of such Commissions: And I will not at any time endeavour any alteration of Government in Church or State.

Many of the Non-Conformists have taken this Oath, being satisfied in the sense which all Lawyers that have discoursed do give of it, viz. that by Commissionated by him, we are to understand Legally Commissionated; and by Endeavouring any alteration of Government we are to understand it thus, that I will not endeavour it by any Seditious way, or Unlawful means.

In this sense I offered the Judges in open Court to take it (having before made the like offer to the Justices), but being tied up to the Words of the Oath, and not having then advised with Lawyers and others about the Sense, as since I have done, I did therefore refuse to take it, and suffered six months Imprisonment upon that account.

But being better satisfied about these things by

a Paper called *The Sheriffs Case*, printed 1680. and again reprinted 1681 : And being further satisfied of the true sense of this Oath, by Mr. *Corbets* account of the *Non-conformists Principles and Practices* p. 11, 14. and other writings of his not yet published : And especially being fully satisfied of the lawfulness of taking the said Oath, by particular Advice from *Council* learned in the Law, who better understand the meaning of Laws than we *Ministers* do, who have told me, that an *Illegal Commission* in law-sense is *no Commission* ; and that the Parliament cannot be understood to prohibit *Legal endeavors* to make any alteration of Government, but only such as are *Illegal* (for if so they should by their practice contradict themselves in the many endeavors that since they have made in a legal way) : And lastly, having received Instructions from the forementioned *Sheriffs Case*, how to declare our Sense of the said Oath, before, or at the time of taking it, in as publick a manner as we take it, that hereby we may avoid giving of scandal to others : And also being encouraged herein by Mr. *Baxters* words in the life of Mr. *Ashurst* (quoted also in the said *Sheriffs Case* printed 81.) owning those as *worthy Men* who did what he refused (speaking of *All* in the Corporation Act,

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which is much more to be scrupled than this Oath alone) supposing that *they in words or writing declared as openly as they swear, that they take it in such or such a lawful Sense*, p. 48 : I say, upon these several Considerations I can *Now* with as good a Conscience take the said Oath, as formerly I did *refuse* it. And therefore in the sense as afore explained, and no other, (Delivering hereby my own Soul) I shall be ready, when call'd thereto by the Magistrate, to take the same in the words of the Act.

A Third Law made against Non-conformists is the *Conventicle Act*, made to *prevent and suppress Seditious Conventicles* : By the rigorous execution whereof, the People as well as the Ministers have bin great sufferers, though never any thing of *Sedition* could be *Charged*, much less *proved* against Me, or my Brethren that I can hear of.

Whether our many and great troubles upon this account are not *self-made* Troubles, or long of our selves, hath many times been disquieting to my mind.

About four or five years past, when the Informers & Officers were very troublesome to us, and had taken away the Goods of some of the Congregation, I told my People at a Meeting of two,

or

or three Hundred of them, that I saw how unable they were to bear such Troubles and Losses, and that I could not be faithful to them, or to my own Conscience, without telling them, that though I were not *fond* of the Common-Prayer, having never read it in my life, yet it was my judgment, and most of our Ministers, that it was lawful to read it; and that by the reading of it they might be free from the penalty of this Law for the time to come, and therefore if they met with further troubles for want of reading it, they should blame themselves, and not me.

Some few were so weak, that for speaking those words, they never came within the Meeting-Place since that I can hear of: Some more (twenty or there about) were so much prejudiced against the using a Form of Prayer, that I found there was danger of making a breach amongst us; and that a new-gathered Congregation could not bear so great a shaking, till they were a little better settled. I did therefore for the sake of *those few*, forbear to use it, contenting my self only, with reading the Scriptures, the Creed, Commandments, and the use of the Lords-Prayer.

And now at last, having first advised with my *Brethren* in the Ministry, who acknowledge the lawfulness of using of the Liturgy in the *Ordinary Lords-Days-Service*, and with *Lawyers*, who tell me, that the reading of it will prove the *Lawfulness* of our Meeting, and secure

us from any further trouble : I have therefore begun to read it, and upon proof thereof, by several Witnesses to the Grand Jury at *Westminster* this last Term, I brought in a Bill of Indictment against Justice Parry, Richard Toovey Distiller, John Pollard in Parkers Lane Informer, and several others for a Ryot, in breaking open the doors of my Meeting-Place, when our *Worship* was not in other manner than according to the *Liturgy and Practice of the Church of England*; And another Bill of Indictment for a Ryot against the said Justice Parry, Thomas Harris Cheesemonger, John Pollard, Stephen Leucas the Smith, and others, for breaking open the door of my dwelling-House the Lords day before, where there was nothing of any *Worship or Company* to ground any pretence of an *Unlawful Meeting* upon.

The said Jury have found both the Bills, and in due time I shall make further trial of this point at Common Law, whether *They or I* are the transgressors of it.

I am sensible that these things make a great noise, and the mouths of many are opened against me. The railings and threatnings of prophane Drunken *Damne's* I matter not : I do not Arrest them and Indict them, for doing *their Office*, as they are the Kings Officers, but for doing *more than their Office* : If they have done well, they shall have praise
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for the same. Possibly they may have the repeated thanks of a *Middlesex* Court of Justices: But we know that no Law is made for a *Righteous Man*, but for the *Lawless and Disobedient*; for the *Ungodly*, and for *Sinners*; for the *unholy and prophane*; For *Murderers of Fathers*, and *Murderers of Mothers*; for *Manslayers*, for *Whoremongers*; I may add, for *House-breakers*, and *Sabbath-breakers*; for *Prophane Swearers* and *Drunkards*; for idle prodigal spend-thrifts that care not to pay their debts. Such persons as these, may find some others perhaps as Zealous for the execution of the KING'S Laws as themselves, and Time will discover who are the KING'S best Subjects.

But there is another sort, whom I am concerned to give all due satisfaction to; that is, to my Brethren the *Ministers*, who are not under the like circumstances with me, and therefore may not think fit to do what I have done; and to my *People* among whom I have laboured near seven Years, not without good encouragement and success, and therefore I am very tender lest I should justly offend the one or the other. If there be any one then that shaketh the head, and saith, *I wonder that Mr. Read should read the Common-Prayer?* I answer, which of you convinceth me of Sin? If I have done Iniquity, I will do so no more; or If I have done evil, (in reading the Liturgy)

liturgy) bear witness of the evil; but if well, why judgest thou thy Brother?

I confess my *Practice*, is yet *Singular*, and perhaps the first publick instance of this nature in *England*, so far as I can understand: But the *Principles* on which it is grounded, are undeniable, and far from the imputation of Singularity. Yea, and the *Practice* too of using a Publick *Liturgy*, or form of *Prayer* in Publick assemblyes for the Worship of God, is of such universal extent, that there are few Churches in the World without it, so far as I can understand.

The principles I go upon are such as these, *viz.* That obedience to the Magistrate in things lawful, is a duty. That a form of *Prayer* is Lawful. That it is the Pastors work upon good advice, to judge of the expediency of using such a form of *Prayer*, by the general rules of *doing all to the Glory of God*, edification of his People, and the publick good. That Communion with such Churches who use a form of *Prayer* is lawful also, supposing they do not make any thing that is *Sinful* the *Terms* of their Communion.

Whether these Principles are not acknowledged as sound by the Brethren of all persuasions, and whether my practice be not agreeable to these Principles, I submit to the Judgment of others.

Mr. Nye, a leading Man among our Brethren the *Independents*, hath proved it lawful to hear a Parish Minister;

ster; And Mr. Tombs, as eminent among the *Anabaptists*, wrote a Book to prove it lawful both to hear and communicate with them; And his Practice at *Salisbury* was conformable thereto. Many of our Brethren here about *London* go to the Parish Churches, and hear *Common-Prayer* there, and some of them communicate with them sometimes. The *Non-Conformists* both *Ministers* and *People* in many places, through the Land, go to their Parish Churches, and maintain Peace and Love by occasional Communion with them.

Many of our Brethren did read the *Common-Prayer*, before they turned out of their Livings as I before noted; and would they not be glad to read it again, if thereby they might have the exercise of their Ministry, and their Maintenance restored? And if upon these terms they could read it at the Church (suppose at *St. Giles's*) then why may not I read it in the Chappel (here at *Bloomsbury*)? If I may Judg of the *Non-Conformists* in other Countreyes by those in *Worcestershire* where I lived, I do verily believe there is not one in ten, but would be thankful to *GOD* and Man, if they might be restored to their Livings by doing only what I have done. Therefore thou art inexcusable O Man, whoever thou art that Judgest thy Brother. For that which thou judgest lawful to be done by another, thou forbarest thyself: and because thou forbarest doing it thy self, thou

thou condemnest him. I will repeat this word only to my Bretheren, If there be *Sin* in the *Case*, I shall choose to *Suffer* rather than *Sin*, as soon as I am convinced of it.

As for satisfaction to the Scrupulous and well-meaning Christians among us, whose minds are so much prejudiced against the *Publick* Ministry, and the *Way* of their *Worship*, and therefore will not bear the use of the *Liturgy* of the Church in the Unexceptionable part of the ordinary Service, but cry out against it as *Will-Worship*, *Antichristian*, *Idolatry* and the like, I shall in *General* only say thus much. If they will go to the Ministers of *Christ* as *little Children*, that is, as *humble learners*, willing to be taught; and by converse with them, and other understanding Christians, as also by searching into the *Scriptures*, and reading of good Books, will endeavour the *Cure*, or at leastwise the *Abating*, of their Prejudice; I doubt not but we shall quickly be more like-minded in these things. And if then they will lay aside Animosities, and be so humble as to think soberly of themselves, and weigh the Judgment of those with whom they Consult, who better understand these things than they, it's like they will be more ready to Judg, or be Ashamed, of themselves, than to Censure me, and such as joyn with me.

In particular, next I must refer them to such Godly, Learned, Judicious, and peaceable Authors, as these hereafter mentioned, viz. Mr. Nye, Dr. Owen, Mr. Ball, Mr. Baxter, and Mr. Corbett, supposing they will be satisfied by what they have Published, when they will not by any thing I can say or write on this Subject.

Mr. Nye, in his Case considered, *Whether we may lawfully hear the now Conforming Ministers, who are Re-ordain'd, and have renounced the Covenant, and some of them supposed to be scandalous in their lives?* answers affirmatively, pag. 4. That it is a Duty that we and our Families frequent (as we have liberty and opportunity) the more publick and national Ministry, and gives us this as one Reason, pag. 5. As we are Members of Churches, so we are Subjects and Members of this Commonwealth, and are obliged thereby to observe

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the lawful Commands of our Governours, and to be Examples therein to others.

‘ And again, p. 6. If Church Members, or any one Godly Man, hath a Warrant to forbear hearing such Ministers upon this account of unlawfulness, then all Godly Men ought at all times so to do; and if so, the Examples of the Godly to the generality being very leading in the Matters of God, this Ordinance thereby will be little frequented, and of less Efficacy to those that do come to it; and by asserting it unlawful to hear such Ministers, we imply it were better for the Nation, there were no Preaching but in particular Churches; and if so, what can we expect will become of many thousands, in an ordinary way of Salvation, that have no benefit at all by our Church-instructions? We are to walk wisely, yea mercifully towards them that are without.

And

And towards the conclusion, p. 24. he tells us, *That this is one of the mispersasions of these latter Times, by which Mens Minds have been corrupted, that it is unlawful to hear in Publick, which I am perswaded (saith he) is one constant design of Satan, in the variety of wayes in Religion he hath set on foot by Jesuits among us. Let us therefore be the more aware of whatever tends that way.*

Even Dr. Owen, who in his Discourse of the work of the Spirit in Prayer, writes against the making or composing of Forms of Prayer for our selves to be used privately, desires the Reader, p. 220. to observe *that he doth not argue against Forms of Prayer as unlawful to be used ; and, p. 222. he grants, that Men or Churches may agree upon a prescribed Form by common consent, as judging and avowing it best for their own Edification.*

Again, p. 228. "Whether they are approved or disapproved of God, whether they are lawful or unlawful, we do not consider, but only, whether they are for Spiritual benefit and advantage for the good of our own Souls, and the Edification of others, as set up in competition with the Gift before described. So that it seems the Dr. doth not judge such Forms of Prayer unlawful which are for the good of our own Souls, and the Edification of others, and which are not in competition with the Gift before described.

"And therefore (p. 231, and 232.) supposing that those who make use of, and plead for Forms of Prayer, especially in publick, do in a due manner prepare themselves for it by holy meditation, with an endeavour to bring their Souls into a holy

“ly frame of fear, delight and reverence
 “of God; let it also be supposed that they
 “have a good end and design in the Wor-
 “ship they address themselves unto, namely
 “the Glory of God, and their own Spirit-
 “tual advantage; the Prayers themselves,
 “though they should be in some things ir-
 “regular, may give occasion to exercise
 “those acts of Grace which they were o-
 “therwise prepared for: And I say yet further,
 “that whilst these Forms of Prayer are
 “cloathed with the general notions of
 “Prayer, that is, are esteemed as such in the
 “minds of them that use them, are ac-
 “companied in their use with the re-
 “tives and ends of Prayer, express no mat-
 “ter unlawful to be insisted on in Prayer,
 “directing the Souls of Men to none but
 “lawful Objects of Divine Worship and
 “Prayer, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
 “and whilst men make use of them with
 “the true design of Prayer, looking after
 due

“ due assistance unto Prayer, I do not judge
 “ there is any such evil in them, as that God will
 “ not Communicate his Spirit to any in the
 “ use of them, so as that they should have
 “ no holy Communion with him in and
 “ under them. Much less will I say, that God
 “ never therein regards their Persons, or re-
 “ jects their praying as unlawful : For the
 “ Persons and Duties of Men may be ac-
 “ cepted with God, when they walk and act
 “ in sincerity according to their light, though
 “ in many things, and those of no small
 “ importance, sundry irregularities are found
 “ both in what they do, and in the man-
 “ ner of doing it. Where Persons walk be-
 “ fore God in their Integrity, and practise
 “ nothing contrary to their light and con-
 “ viction in his Worship, God is merciful
 “ unto them, although they order not e-
 “ very thing according to the Rule and
 “ Measure of the Word. So was it with them
 “ who came to the Passover in the days of
 “ Heze-

“*Hezekiah, they had not cleansed themselves,*
 “*but did eat the Passover otherwise than it was*
 “*written, 2 Chron. 30. 18.*

And, p. 235. He grants that such Forms of Prayer have not any *intrinsic* evil in the composition of them; but argues against the setting up and prescribing such Forms of Prayer Universally, in opposition, and unto the exclusion of free Prayer.

And, p. 236. “If they appear not contrary unto, or inconsistent with, or are not
 “used in a way exclusive of that work of
 “the Holy Spirit in Prayer which we have
 “described from the Scripture, nor are reducible to any divine prohibition, I shall
 “not contend with any about them.

Mr. *Baxters* Cure of Church-divisions, I recommend to the reading of such as lie under the temptation of unwarrantable Separation,

paration, as also Mr. *Ball* of that Subject at large. The whole of them is so useful, that I do not think fit to Transcribe any thing of either of them: But I will give you a little of what Mr. *Baxter* hath written, not only as his own judgment, but other Ministers of his converse and acquaintance, in his *Second Plea for Peace*, shewing what *Non-conformity* is not.

Page 100. " We are far from condemning all Forms of Prayer and publick Liturgies as unlawful, of which we have His Majesties Testimony in his *Declaration about Ecclesiastical Affairs*, much more are we far from condemning all the Ancient and present Churches of Christ that have used such, or yet use them, throughout the Christian World; and yet further are we from Separating from them on that account (for using Liturgies) and from encouraging such a Separation.

And

And, p. 101. We think it not unlawful to use as much of the *English* Liturgy as we consented to use, when by His Majesties Commission some of us treated about the Reformation or Alteration of it, viz. in such Assemblies where the Peoples incapacity maketh not such use of it more hurtful then helpful to their Edification. And we joyn with Mr. *Ball*, and others of the old *Non-conformists*, in thanking God that *England* hath a more reformed Liturgy than most of the Churches in the World. We are far from judging the Parish-Ministers to be no true Ministers of Christ, or the Parish-Churches no true Churches, or judging it unlawful to hold Communion with them.

Mr. *Corbett*, in his *Account of the Principles and Practises of the Non-conformists*, Page 4. saith, We acknowledge the lawfulness of a Set Form of Liturgy, for mat-

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ter agreeable to Gods Word, and suited to the nature of the several Ordinances, and to the necessities of the Church. Yet the Minister should not be so confined to it, as not to make use of his own Gifts of Prayer and Exhortation.

Page 8. Moreover we hold not ourselves obliged to forsake a true Church, as no Church, for the corruptions and disorders found therein; or to Separate from its Worship, for the tolerable faults thereof, while our personal profession of some Errour, or Practice of some Evil, is not required as the Terms of our Communion. Howbeit we are not so indifferent in this matter, as to make no difference between Churches, and Pastors: The more pure and powerful Administration of Gods Ordinances, is to be preferred before that which is more faulty and less effectual: And here again we acknowledge, that in this preference due caution must be used: We must not respect our
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own particular benefit, before publick Peace and Order, and the general good.

Page 9. It is our Principle, That Humane Laws bind the Conscience, or (to speak more properly) the Subjects in point of Conscience, not by a primary Obligation, as the Laws of God do, but by a secondary and subordinate, as from a power derived from God. As it is an evident and important Truth, That Inferiours ought to obey their Superiours for Conscience sake; so it is as evident and important, That when Mens Commands contradict the Commands of God, it is God and not Man that must have the preheminence in our Obedience.

Page 21. We renounce not Communion in the publick Worship of the Parish-Churches, though for its outward Form and Order, in some respects, it be not that which is most desirable by us.

Page 26. We have not forsaken the Parochial Assemblies, but have joyned in the

Service of God there performed, and some of us do it in our ordinary course, and others of us have not declined it of set purpose, but as our absence is caused by that necessary Work of the Ministry, whereunto we are called: Some of us have Communicated with the said Assemblies in the Sacrament of the Lords Supper: Yet we would not have our Charity and Peaceableness mistaken for an indifferency unto Communion with all Parochial Churches and Ministers whatsoever, or for a full satisfaction or acquiescence in the whole, and all particulars of the Liturgy, so as to be able to declare our unfeigned Assent and Consent to all and every thing therein contained.

Page 30. Whereas a remarkable Writer hath published these words, (*We should be reconciled, if the Presbyterian Ministers would perswade their People to do what they can do themselves.*) We declare to the World that we

we heartily embrace these Terms of Reconciliation, and as we have done already, we will not relax our utmost to persuade them, upon whom we have any influence; and we would gladly come to the Tryal to see which Party should outvie the other in forwardness in allaying the present Differences, and restoring the Differences, and drawing on towards Peace and Union. We have here done our part to remove the Offences taken at us, by testifying to all Men, that Conscientious dissatisfaction, and not Carnal Interest, or a Spirit of opposition, is the ground of our Nonconformity. And in bringing such as differ from us to be in more Charity with us, than to judge that we are utterly unworthy or incapable of the publick Ministry, or that such Persons as for ignorance and lawlessness are scandalous and contemptible among their Neighbours, are more tolerable in Sacred Office than we are, or that the Affliction has befallen us from our gross

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gross Insufficiency, Non-residence, and other
 banious negligence, should be made less Cri-
 minal than our dissent about the Ceremo-
 nies, Subscriptions, Renunciations, and
 such like Injunctions. We submit what we
 have done to the Wisdom, Piety, and Cle-
 mency of our Governours; we acquiesce
 in Gods Wise and Holy Determinations con-
 cerning us: And we resolve through his
 Grace to abide stedfast and unmoveable in
 our Subjection and Loyalty to our Sove-
 reign, in our due Obedience to those that are
 put in Authority under him, in our earnest
 endeavour of Holiness, Unity, and Peace in
 the Church, in Brotherly love to all Faithful
 Christians, in Charity to all men, and in the
 Faith and Patience of the Disciples and Ser-
 vants of Jesus Christ.

I will only add his Sense of the *Oxford Oath*,
 which I heartily subscribe to, *psal.* When the
 higher Powers command what God forbids,
 though we are bound not to perform it,
 yet we must be subject, and not resist, but
 patiently

patiently submit to Suffering. The Cause of Religion doth not warrant Subjects to take Arms against their lawful Prince, nor may they by armed Violence against Authority, attempt the publick Reformation thereof. We hold, that it is unlawful, by the Constitutions and Laws of this Kingdom, for any Subjects to take Arms against the King, his Office, Authority, or Person, or by force of Arms to resist any Magistrate or Officer legally Commissionated or Authorized by him; yea, Subjects are bound not only not to resist, but to assist and defend their Sovereign with their Estates, and Lives; and the Preachers of the Gospel ought to teach the People Obedience and Loyalty, and to endeavour to root out all Principles of Sedition, Rebellion, and Disobedience. We believe that we are under no Bond or Obligation to act any thing contrary to these our avowed Principles. And we further make known our detestation of all the Indignity and

and Violence offered to the Person of our late Sovereign, and especially that most horrid execrable Fact of taking away his Life, as also the Usurpations and violent change of the Government that did accompany the same, against which Crimes, while they were carried on, the Brethren of our Perswasion openly protested even to the Faces of the Actors.

And. p. 14. We declare, That we will not endeavour any alteration of the Government in Church or State, as it is in the King, whose Civil and Ecclesiastical Supremacy we have before acknowledged; nor the alteration of the true Episcopal Office which Christ hath settled in his Church; nor will we endeavour any alteration in the Church, by any Seditious or unlawful means, but only by Prayer to God, by humbly petitioning our Superiours, or obeying the King if he Command it, or such like lawful means as belong to us in our Places and Callings.

If

If the names of *Ball*, *Baxter* and *Corbet*, sound harsh with some of you, methinks however the names of *Tombs*, *Nye* and *Owen*, should make a greater figure among you, and be of greater Authority with such as have not patience to hear the *Name*, much less the *Thing* called *Communion*.

If at the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established, *Deut.* 19. 15. Here is the testimony of three of your *own*, as well as three more of the *other* side, against such as refuse Communion, with such Ministers and Churches who do much more than I have done.

Will you not hear Mr. *Nye* telling you your duty, That *you and your Families* should frequent the publick Ministry, That *you are obliged to observe the lawful Commands of your Governours*, That this principle, That it is unlawful to hear in publick, is a mispersuasion of these latter times set on foot by the Jesuits? Will you not hear Dr. *Owen* telling you that he doth not argue against forms of Prayer as unlawful to be used; That, whilst you make use of them with the true design of Prayer, looking after due assistance unto Prayer, he doth not judge there is any such evil in them, as that God will not Communicate his Spirit to any in the use of them, &c. Will you let me add one more passage in his Preface? I do not say the fatal Consequence of the introduction of human devised set forms of Prayer in the worship of the Church, by the horrible abuse of it, is sufficient to condemn them as absolutely unlawful. Will you have no regard to the Ministers of all persuasions, who tell you by their principles and practices the lawfulness

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of what I do? Behold a greater than Dr. Owen, &c. is here, the *Apostle* of the *Gentiles*, great Saint Paul, telling you, that unto the *Jews* he became as a *Jew* that he might gain the *Jews*, &c. To the weak he became as weak that he might gain the weak: I am made all things saith he, to all men, that I might by all means save some, 1 Cor. 9. 20. &c. And he was so zealous for the saving of Souls that he could condescend to any thing that might be done with a good Conscience. His own practice was the best comment on this Text, in taking *Timothy* to him as his Assistant or fellow-labourer in the Gospel, and *Circumcising him because of the Jews that were in those quarters, for they knew all that his Father was a Greek*, Acts 16. 3. Here is a piece of condescension indeed; a far greater piece of Conformity than the reading of a form of Prayer. *Timothy* had the repute of a *Gentile*, but becomes a *Jew*, that he might gain the *Jews*: And *Paul* chooseth to make use of him as his partner in his Ministry, that his Preaching might be the more acceptable to the *Jews* in those quarters. See also the advice of *James* and the other Elders to *Paul*, Acts 21. 18. &c. when he came to *Jerusalem*. Thou seest Brother how many thousands of *Jews* there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the Law, ver. 20. and they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the *Jews* which are among the *Gentiles* to forsake *Moses*, saying that they ought not to Circumcise their Children, &c. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four Men which have a vow on them; them take, and purifie thy self with them, that they may shave their heads, and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee

thee are nothing, but that thou thy self walkest orderly, and keepest the Law, ver. 24. &c. And should not I and other Ministers walk as we have *Paul* for our example? Give me leave to apply this piece of Conformity in him to our present case. You see how many thousands in this Parish and many others are as zealous for Common-Prayer (as some very few are zealous against it) and they are misinformed that I and other Nonconformists teach the people Rebellion, and that we instill into them the principles of Schism, and draw them away from the Publick Ministry and Ordinances; Therefore that we may convince gainsayers that these things whereof the people are informed against us are nothing, but that we also walk orderly and keep the Law, I have thought fit to do what I have done in obedience to the Law of the Land, that hereby I may be instrumental of gaining some Souls to Christ of these many thousands that are ready to Perish for lack of knowledge. Remember Mr. Nyes words, that *we are to walk wisely, &c., mercifully towards them that are without.*

Object. If these be your Principles that it is lawful to read and hear Common Prayer, why did you not do it at first and conform as the rest of the Ministers in the Parish Churches?

Answer. I have told you already, if that only had been required of us, we had done it; but other things being required which we account sinful, we rather chose the pleasing of God and the peace of our Consciences in a way of duty, than honours and preferments from men in a way of sin.

Object. If the Common-Prayer be read at your meeting.

ing-place, we will rather go to the Parish Church and hear it there.

Ans. If you think you have not enough of it with us, you may go to Church and have more: But if you account what I read too much, you argue perversly in talking of going to them who do more than I have done. But I answer further, I have not, I will not in the least discourage your going to the Publick Assemblies. The same Gospel is Preached with them as with us, and with some of them, I doubt not, more judiciously, and perhaps more profitably than by such as I, and whether may be more prosperous this or that we know not: So be it Christ be Preached here or there, we rejoyce and will rejoyce.

Again, our Assemblies are not set up in opposition to, but in conjunction with, or in subordination to those in Publick; and therefore to such as charge us with setting up Altars and Churches in a way of Rebellion against the Government, and to turn away the people from following the Lord in the way of his Worship in the Parish Churches, I answer as the Tribes of the Children of *Ruben* and the Children of *Gad* and half Tribe of *Manasse* answered and said (upon a like occasion) unto the heads of the thousands of *Israel*. *Josh. 22. The Lord God of Gods, The Lord God of Gods he knoweth and Israel he shall know, if it be in Rebellion or in transgression against the Lord — let the Lord himself require it: And if we have not rather done it for fear of this thing, saying, in time to come your Children might say unto our Children, saying, what have you to do with the Lord God of Israel?* Our Governours have made the Act of Uniformity, a
Border

Border, a Wall of Separation between us and the Conformists, who are ready to say, ye have no part with us in the Ministerial work or in the Parish Assemblies for the Worship of God; If therefore we may not keep up our own *Meetings*, when we may not have liberty to Preach in the *Churches*, they shall make us to *Cease from fearing the Lord.*

And again I answer, The Harvest is great, the Laborers few, and Souls are precious; Go therefore where you will, it shall not offend, but please me; if the Net of the Gospel may be spread, and bring you into Christ by their Ministry or ours. But take heed of this dividing principle which some I see are acted by, of forsaking the Ministry and Ordinances of Christ, and the Communion of Saints, as soon as a form of prayer is used in any part of their worship: If God accept such worship and worshippers, (as no doubt but he doth where they lift up holy hands with pure hearts to him) he will not be very well pleased with such as reject them: And let me intreat you to consider whether this dividing principle will lead you: As soon as our Governours shall be pleased to open the Church-doors a little wider, and the Non-Conformists shall generally do the same thing that now I have done, you will then either repent of your Error, or if you persist in it, you will forsake their Assemblies also, as soon as a form of Prayer (according to your fancy) hath polluted them, and then I dread to think where I may quickly find you. Either among the deluded Quakers, to cast off all Ministers and Ordinances; or among the Papists or Atheists, (of the *Roman* Religion or no Religion, for they are much alike)

and so to lay aside the common principles of Morality, and act contrary to the very light of Nature as well as Scripture. But I hope better things of you (whom especially and particularly I write this to) even things that accompany Salvation: And therefore as a means for that end I warn you, yea, in the words of the Apostle, Rom. 16. 17. 18. *I beseech you Brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them; for they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

What may be the result of this leading example, God only knows, and time must discover: Be it what it will, I am not much concern'd, *having I trust a good Conscience (in this matter,) in all things willingly to live honestly.* Duty is our part, the Issues or Events of things belong unto God: But something appears above board already.

On the one side the wrathful and prophane, finding me out of the reach of the Conventicle Act, that they cannot hurt me, no nor hinder my work that way, have this last week put me into the Bishops Court; from whom nothing less than *Excommunication*, yea, and a Goal, if possible, can be expected. Though we yeild as far as we can in things lawful, there is no Union, no Peace nor agreement to be had with such men.

On the other side, there are some among our selves of dividing and unpeaceable Principles and Spirits; who seem to be so incurably prejudiced as to resolve they *will have no Communion with such Ministers or Churches*, who in some little things cross their humour, and do therefore

fore begin to *excommunicate themselves*, before they have so much as heard what is to be said in the Case. These are people, who are *wiser in their own conceit than seven men that can render a Reason*. I have given you the names of six already (Nye, Owen, Tombs, Ball, Baxter, and Corbet) I will add a seventh, Dr. Thomas Goodwin (*one among the first three of the Independents*) who in his Works lately printed in Folio on the *Ephesians Sermon*. 36. pag. 488. hath these words. 'Whereas now 'in some of the Parishes of this Kingdom there are many godly men, that do constantly give themselves up 'to the worship of God, and meet together in one place 'to that end, in a constant way, under a godly Minister, 'whom they themselves have chosen to cleave to (though 'they did not choose him at first,) These, notwithstanding 'their mixture and want of discipline, I never thought 'for my part, but that they were true Churches of 'Christ. *Again, pag. 489.* So that I profess my self as 'zealous in this point, as in any other I know: And for 'my part this I say, and I say it with much integrity, I 'never took up Religion by Parties in the lump: I have 'found by trial of all things, that there is some Truth on 'all sides; I have found holiness, where you would little think it, and so likewise Truth: And I have learned this principle, which, I hope, I shall never lay down 'till I am swallowed up in immortality, and that is, to 'acknowledge every good thing, and hold communion 'with it in men, in Churches or whatsoever else. My Brethren, This Rule (which I profess I have lived by and 'shall do while I live) I know I shall never please men in: 'For this is the Nature and condition of all Mankind; if

‘ a man dissent from others in one thing, he crosseth them
 ‘ in all the rest : and therefore if a man take what is
 ‘ good of all sides he is apt to cross them all, but he pleaseth
 ‘ Christ by it : and so I will for this particular.

To return and to conclude you see how the Church of
 Christ is divided and broke to peices by one and the other
 party abovementioned : I stand alone in the front, and
 am in danger on both sides : Give me leave to speak in
Jehosaphats words. O my God, wilt thou not judg them,
for I have no might against this great Company that cometh
against me, neither know I what to do, but mine eyes are
upon thee.

I will yet take heart and further incourage my self
 from the words of a Soldier, whose valour I see I shall
 need in this case. *When Joab saw that the front of the Bat-*
tle was against him, before and behind, he put the choice
men in array, and said he of good courage, and let us
play the men, for our people, and for the Citie of our God,
and the Lord do what seemeth him good.

Febr. 23. 1681. From
 my Study in great Rus-
 sel Street, Bloomsbury.

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